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KT photo | **Tim Bath**
Rob Burgess, Tribune night editor

House of Burgess: 'Seaver Fever' strikes Kokomo

Kirk Cameron wants to save your marriage.

By Rob Burgess
Tribune columnist

As it turned out, I only had the opportunity to ask Kirk Cameron one question Saturday, but I think I made it count.

The occasion was his Love Worth Fighting For Tour, sponsored by Moody Radio, The Love Shirts and evangelical nonprofits Crown Financial Services and Feed the Hungry. The actor was joined by musician Warren Barfield,

whose song “Love Is Not a Fight” was featured in Cameron’s 2008 movie “Fireproof.”

At around 4:15 p.m. when the V.I.P. Q&A session began at First Church of the Nazarene, Cameron appeared on stage in jeans and a red T-shirt with the words “MY WIFE ROCKS.” He told us in “Fireproof” his wife of 22 years, Chelsea Noble, appears as an uncredited photo double for his on-screen spouse (Erin Betha) in a scene where the characters embrace.

“I don’t kiss women who aren’t my wife,” he said.

Right before the end of the session, he acknowledged me.

“So, you were an atheist until your late teens, when you converted,” I said. “Most people probably, at least initially, know you from ‘Growing Pains.’ ... If you had had the faith you have now from the beginning, would you still have been on the show?”

Pause.

“I feel so bad about what I’m going to say, because I know you guys love ‘Growing Pains’ so much,” he said. “I have standards today that I did not have [then.] ... My kids have never seen an episode of ‘Growing Pains.’”

Later, he told me he knew I wrote for the newspaper because my question was too thoughtful and I had immediately written down what he said.

Perhaps the fact his character's mother, Maggie Seaver (Joanna Kerns), was a journalist contributed to his intuition. That, I thought, was that.

But when he re-emerged at 6:22 p.m. to a standing ovation from a packed house of mostly couples, I knew differently. Cellphones emerged en masse, flashing. No sooner had he high-fived every male in the front row, Cameron was back on the dais — his natural habitat. He said he knew the women wouldn't be able to concentrate until he provided relief from what he called "Seaver Fever."

"I need to get into character here," he said. We could help, he said, by singing the "Growing Pains" theme song while he disappeared behind a curtain. When he re-appeared to the whole crowd belting it, his jeans were rolled up, and he was absolutely in character. He recited Mike Seaver lines and acted out scenes from the show.

It was amazing. People loved it. "Remember this?" he said, as he unrolled his pant legs. "I know you do. All right guys, do me a favor. Reach over to your wife's forehead ... that fever is gone."

He couldn't totally think "Growing Pains" was evil or else he wouldn't be doing this, I thought. And who could blame him? He was the star of one of the most successful sitcoms of the late '80s and early '90s. He used to appear on the cover of Tiger Beat. What would you do?

I personally disagree with Cameron on a whole host of issues — human sexuality and evolutionary biology, for starters — but I thought the event stayed on point. My wife, Ash, was also in attendance. We found several pieces of relationship advice to be solid.

Attendee Lynelle Mellady said she appreciated both the spiritual and humorous aspects. “I found it to be a good, Christian perspective on how to have a good marriage,” she said. “It was scripturally sound and I learned a lot about what the Bible says about marriage. It was also fun to relive some of the ’80s with ‘Seaver Fever!’”

I give Cameron credit for being a former child star who isn’t incarcerated or deceased. He has six children, a decades-long marriage and a steady job making movies and giving “Fireproof”-related marriage advice.

And he and many others will always have a terminal case of “Seaver Fever.”

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